

As an American woman, freedom encompasses who I am and is demonstrated in every day life. Without it, my individuality would be covered by a black sheath, with only a hole for my eyes to see and my spirit left to wither. Freedom allows me to walk through the sunshine of downtown Santa Barbara with my hair down and the breeze blowing in my face. I'm allowed to expose my legs and bare feet, without fear of punishment. I can walk tall, be proud, and look everyone, including men, in the eye.

Freedom means that I have the privilege of going to the grocery store on a whim because I suddenly remembered that I need cheese, milk, or bread. I can spend twenty minutes choosing between brands. I don't have to wait for the limited monthly rations that the government hands out. On the way into the store, I tell the picketers that I hope their medical benefits come through soon. On the way home, I wonder if the demonstrators are still marching outside of the gates of my base, protesting the militarization of space, and the job that I perform every day.

Freedom is present in my family's recreation. Of the thousands of places we can choose to vacation around the world, we never doubt that we will land safely back on American soil. While we wait in line to see a soccer game, we know that the only violence the field is used for is the occasional kick in the shins or ball to the face. The field is for recreation, not brutal public executions.

At home, I can turn on the television and exercise my freedom to watch Mr. Democrat battle Mr. Republican. The candidates debate on why our president is no longer an effective leader. Both men walk away without fear of retribution or execution for speaking ill of their leader. When Super Tuesday rolls around, I have a choice between more than one name on the ballot. My choice has not already been made for me. I have the option of viewing several different news channels. I'm not required to view only government-sponsored propaganda.

At night, I can tuck my child into bed and listen to her as she says, "Mommy, when I grow up, I want to be a firefighter, or a doctor, or a soldier..." Her life is not determined for her; instead, all doors are open. On Sunday, I have the freedom to contemplate religion and ask, is Christianity best for me? Maybe I agree more with Buddhist or Jewish principles. Maybe my beliefs fit another religion better. I can even choose to not worship at all.

Freedom to me ultimately means that I can be who I want to be without consequences or rejection. My opinions and views are accepted and my life is free of fear. The privileges of freedom are inherent in everything I do. I refuse to accept anything less than living freely in our precious nation.